論　文

Gondal Poems: A Reconsideration

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After all is said about her remoteness, what is vital for unriddling the enigma shrouding Emily Bronte is the realization that she lived in sheer detachment from the outer world. Nothing is farther from the truth than to call her an escapist. To say that she was a recluse born and bred does not explain half of what should be explained. Emily Bronte did not merely retreat into her own world, but she wrote this world in prose and verse, written for the most part in the cycle of the Gondal saga. Herein lies the key.

Reluctance to let her work be known lasted Emily for a lifetime. Her later willingness to collaborate in Charlotte's plan to publish their work provides no contradiction. Though *Wuthering Heights* was an apparent attempt at a publication, she is said to have been very angry when she learned that Charlotte had betrayed her identity. Besides, its failure to find readers did not affect her with any seriousness. Emily did not write, as Charlotte did, in order for her voice to be heard by others; her passion for literary composition could kindle "with the least shadow of public thought" (Keats's letter to Shelley, August 1820). Here is one of the rare cases where we can see literary work written simply for the sake of being written. Emily Bronte could well have declared in concert with Keats that "the soul is a world of itself, and has enough to do in its own home" (letter to Reynolds, 25 August 1819).

From the nature of the Gondal saga and from the way Emily was so consistently absorbed in creating it, it would seem that she *committed* herself to the world of her imagination in the profoundest sense of the word and that writing the epic cycle of the imaginary world provided her with something equivalent to our existence in the world of reality. Both in appearance and quality Gondal is a world too realistically- and intricately-made to be a mere dreamland. "Free of the contradictions that make the Young Men's Play ridiculous in the eyes of realism and logic,"[1] it is a full and substantial universe with its own cosmology and chronology, upon which myriad scenes of human drama keep on presenting themselves. As Emily is to date with unfailing accuracy every event in *Wuthering Heights* to give the novel coherence and unity, every major event of the epic appears to be definitely calendared in her mind. Meant to be perfect as a totality, it apparently claims to be a substitute of the real world, in which she could live, move, and have her being.

It is interesting to note in this connection that in her diaries and birthday notes notations

of everyday events in the Bronte household are juxtaposed against records of the Gondal world. And seeing that whereas day-to-day incidents are spoken of variously in the past, present, or future tense, the Gondal happening is always mentioned with casual familiarity in the present tense, Gondal seems a much closer world to her.

> Anne and I went our first long journey by ourselves together, leaving home on the 30th of June, Monday, sleeping at York, returning to Keighley Tuesday evening, sleeping there and walking home on Wednesday morning. Though the weather was broken we enjoyed ourselves very much, except during a few hours at Bradford. And during our excursion we were, Ronald Macalgin, Henry Angora, Juliet Angusteena, Rosabella Esmaldan, Ella and Julian Egremont, Catharine Navarre, and Cordelia Fitzaphnold, escaping from the palaces of instruction to join the Royalists who are hard driven at present by the victorious Republicans. The Gondals still flourish bright as ever. I am at present writing a work on the First Wars. Anne has been writing some articles on this, and a book by Henry Sophona[2].

The striking thing about this passage from Emily's diary of 30 July 1845 is that the description of events during the younger sisters' first and last long trip on their own has completely escaped her pen. The same note of perfunctoriness is struck concerning the way she records in the same diary such a memorable life experience as her and Charlotte's visit to Brussels. On the other hand, with as many as eight Gondal characters enumerated here, the diary tells us at considerable length what is going on in her imaginary world. On top of that, it is something of a shock to know that as it appears, what urged Anne and Emily to take this trip was a Gondal situation of the Republican-Royalist war! Perhaps in all modern history of mankind there exists no stranger case of the invasion, domination, and destruction of the real world by an imaginary one.

Even after Emily learned to write strongly personal poems, like half a dozen written out of her Law Hill experience, far from giving up the framework of Gondal, she wove them into its threads and kept on writing for it all through her adulthood. The result is that the greater part of her poems are members of the epic, her last pen being a Gondal poem. She smiled half in amusement and half in scorn as she listened to Charlotte read from the October issue of the *North American Review*, a sample of little comprehension of the true worth of her novel. As if her failure to communicate her thought to the public were nothing significant, she returned to the world of her own and was working on a long poem about the Gondalian

Civil War only six months before her death.

All these "singularities" leave us with the temptation to view what Emily Bronte was and what she created from a somewhat different angle than they have traditionally been. The discovery of Gondal gave a fresh incentive to the Bronte criticism; not only did it offer a clue to *Wuthering Heights* but it drew public attention to the world of her poetry as it stands in its own right. However, of the great bulk of her poems those which have won notice both among her commentators and admirers are almost always subjective philosophical poems--"The Philosopher," "The Prisoner," "The Visionary," "Remembrance," "No Coward Soul Is Mine" to name only a few notable examples: because of the strong magnetism of these poems of independent value, those which are hard to appreciate unless placed in the Gondal context--mainly narrative poems, but not a few of the lyrics as well, and the Gondal epic itself for that matter--have been left out of serious consideration. Yet suppose, as I do, that the imaginary world had a prior existence for her, that the castle she built in the air existed on a higher plane of reality than the real one. Then it is only too natural to imagine that she felt it imperative to fortify it with the actual and practical, so that the aerial castle might gain ground. This explains fairly well the persistence with which she concerned herself with the *framing* of Gondal, filling it with narrative contents and making the epic cycle ever growing. To see the bulk of her poems in this light, of course, is not to give special emphasis to its narrative group. The point is that only when considered in this context can both the narrative and the philosophical take their right places as well as receive due moment in the whole framework of her poetic world, that is, Gondal, of which the latter are reflections of the mental soil as against the physical represented by the former.

With her ability to realize the imaginary with the vivid intensity of the actual, Emily Bronte presents to us a world in which what is invisible is no less real than what is visible and the things of the spirit as homely as the things of the body. In her lifelong commitment to the cosmos within her soul she may come as a double encouragement to those whose outer life is as uneventful as their inner experience is rich; not only do they have a great predecessor in her, but the philosophy that the accumulation of what one has thought and imagined is his life is now theirs. It is in this sense that a body of work Emily Bronte created bears particular relevance for our time, when man and reality are increasingly out of harmony with each other. How peculiary modern a stanza from "To Imagination" rings:

> So hopeless is the world without,
> The world within I doubly prize;

The world where guile and hate and doubt
And cold suspicion never rise;
Where thou and I and Liberty
Have undisputed sovereignty.

(H. 174)[3]

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All creation is equally insane. There are those flies playing above the stream, swallows and fish diminishing their number each minute: these will become in their turn, the prey of some tyrant of air or water; and man for his amusement or for his needs will kill their murderers. Nature is an inexplicable puzzle, life exists on a principle of destruction; every creature must be the relentless instrument of death to the others, or himself cease to live[4].

Emily Bronte's genius lies in seeing and depicting the world at its crudest. And her view of the world seen in its nakedness is that all created beings suffer from their fellow creatures. She regards the human condition as a one where men can only be related to one another destructively. To her eyes the world is a fair of hypocrisy, cruelty, avarice, and a thousand other detestable vices. A series of essays she wrote in French provide useful reading in this connection. From "The Cat," which speaks of the meanness of human nature as it is compared to the wretchedness of cats, to "The Palace of Death," an allegory where Emily's version of the Seven Deadly Sins personified compete for supremacy, all the seven essays are dominated by such a grim view of mankind that they are as good as a list of human ugliness. "The universe," she says, "appeared to me a vast machine constructed only to bring forth evil."[5] This is what reality presented itself to her.

Explanation of Emily Bronte's awareness of the dark side of human affairs might be possible in several ways. And here again the key is in the so-called physical limitations of her life. She went away from home to seek the society of living people as seldom as possible: the four schools to which she was sent to stay either as a student or as a teacher constituted all she experienced about the human society, and all the four experiences resulted in varying degrees of failure with anything but a pleasant memory left on her. Did not, say, her stay in Cowan Bridge, where her two oldest sisters contracted a fatal disease and which was immortalized in *Jane Eyre*, have a traumatic effect on her mind? As is well known, death was a constant visitor to Haworth Parsonage; although it had already seen the death of the

mother, this was the first time that death was brought in from outside. It is hard not to believe that partly because of her incapacity to cope with the world and partly because of the exactions of the school life in which she was put, not only this first but all the following three school experiences contributed to the formation of an outlook where the world is held to be something most dreadful.

Similarly, I wonder if series of abortive ventures into the world made by her outgoing sister and brother, which were steady in crushing them, were not responsible for the development of this outlook. It is not unreasonable to infer that Branwell's 'affairs,' followed by his degeneration, together with Charlotte's pangs of unrequited love, confirmed Emily in her already fixed conviction that all human relations work destructively.

Another factor which may well have led Emily Bronte to her melancholic pessimism is her "knowledge" of the actual world. Strange as it may sound to say that she had this knowledge, it was exactly the case with her. Charlotte was right when she said: ". . . , intercourse with them [people] she never sought; nor, with very few exceptions, ever experienced. And yet she knew them."[6] Though hers was not first-hand knowledge, it was none the less deep and to the point. To the degree that she got away from the direct world, she buried herself in the world of books and periodicals, thereby seeing the world and people in perspective and essence.

In considerations of influences upon Emily Bronte, it has been something of a tradition to emphasize or to speak only of literary influences. Admittedly, when her concern was far from being confined to literary matters, this is simply partial. Along with her literary interest, we should never fail to note her mind ever opened to the other fields of human activities:

> They took a vivid interest in the public characters, and the local and foreign politics discussed in the newspapers. Long before Maria Bronte died, at the age of eleven, her father used to say he could converse with her on any of the leading topics of the day with as much freedom and pleasure as with any grown-up person[7].

Mrs. Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Bronte, when read from a proper angle, is found to be full of descriptions indicative of the children's keen and active interest in political matters. Charlotte, according to Mrs. Gaskell, "had taken interest in politics ever since she was five years old"[8] and her admiration for the Duke of Wellington was not the product of her romantic reverie but the result of her analytical appraisal of his actions. There seems no

reason why we should not believe that the same thing can be said about Napoleon and Emily. The children were nurtured on the same magazines, such as *Blackwood* and *Frazer*, and for them both the heroes were not so much romantic figures as their contemporaries of political integrity. It is vitally important both in tracing the origin of Emily's pessimism and in considering the true nature of the Gondal chronicles to notice that these periodicals kept them in touch with the political situations at home and on the Continent shortly after the French Revolution and ensuing Napoleonic Wars and that monstrocities of human nature and stark human tragedies shown in wars were as vividly real as anything that could happen to their daily lives rather than a memory of the past. It is small wonder that when Charlotte read *Kenilworth* at the age of 16, she could find Scott's "wonderful knowledge of human nature" in the delineation of Varney, "the personification of consummate villany."[9] Although Mrs. Gaskell was impressed by the fact that "she, knowing nothing of world, both from her youth and her isolated position, has yet been so accustomed to hear 'human nature' distrusted, as to receive the notion of intense and artful villany without surprise,"[10] there is nothing unexpected in this vignette. Charlotte as well as Emily did know the world and that uncommonly.

One danger of talking about influences upon Emily Bronte only in literary terms is that it helps strengthen the image of Emily as a "homebred country girl"[11] who knows practically nothing of the world. As long as this picture, started by Charlotte, persists, we will continue to fail to do justice to Emily Bronte the poet and novelist. That she was at a remove from what is called the world does not mean that she was ignorant of the world. Nor was she apathetic about life.

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'Twas grief enough to think mankind
All hollow, servile, insincere;
But worse to trust to my own mind
And find the same corruption there.

(H. 11)

When Emily Bronte wrote these lines, she betrayed the scheme of her writing. She knew the "corruption" of mankind only too well, and knowing it as she did, she strove to keep her own mind from "the same corruption." To this end she needed another world for her mind to live in, which is as real as but more hopeful than the real one. With all the great

intolerables of life--pain, loss, and cruelty--reflected in it, Gondal is an image of Nature as Emily defines it in her essay. But at the same time, it is something more than that.

The state of human nature defined in "The Butterfly" corresponds to that of the Gondal world, as well as to the human condition of *Wuthering Heights*. With their wars and rebellions, conspirations and treacheries, assassinations and suicides, Gondalians are pictures of the actual people as seen in their nakedness. Where its dominant mood is that of woefulness experienced by each and every one of the characters, it seems as though "all the elaborate machinery of Gondal saga had been contrived as a means of expressing repeatedly, in different forms, one universal experience of absolute destitution":[12]

> Darkness was overtraced on every face;
> Around clouded with storm and ominous gloom;
> In hut or hall there was no resting-place;
> There was no resting-place but one--the tomb!
> All our hearts were the mansions of distress,
> And no one laughed, and none seemed free from care;
> Our children felt their fathers' wretchedness;
> Our homes, one, all were shadowed with despair.
>
> (H. 58)

Yet, while they are molded upon the real people, there is something in the inhabitants of Gondal which is sadly lacking in the former. Emily's favorite theme being the separation of loved ones, her created beings are always under the intense suffering caused by that separation. To say that they are living this suffering would be closer to the truth. Either when the living mourn for the dead or when they yearn after the reunion with the departed, they are really alive in feeling the sense of bereavement, and it is in this capacity to suffer the anguish of irremediable loss with such an intensity that the individuals in Emily Bronte's secret universe are distinct. True, in Gondal are supposed to exist "his subjects and his soldiers. . . , / none of whom a single sigh can spare / To breathe above his tomb" (H. 28) and suchlike, who strongly remind us of Lockwood, "a fixed unbeliever in any love of a year's standing." (*Wuthering Heights*, VII) But the central figures "*do* live more in earnest, more in themselves, and less in surface, change, and frivolous external things."(*W.H.*, VII)

> Now trust a heart that trusts in you,

And firmly say the word "Adieu";
Be sure, wherever I may roam,
My heart is with your heart at home;
Unless there be no truth on earth,
And vows meant true are nothing worth,
And mortal man have no control
Over his own unhappy soul;
Unless I change in every thought,
And memory will restore me nought,
And all I have of virtue die
Beneath far Gondal's Foreign sky. . .
But that pure light, changeless and strong,
Cherished and watched and nursed so long;
That love that first its glory gave
Shall be my pole star to the grave.

(H. 33)

Like any other human relationship, love in Gondal works destructively and is invariably short-lived on the face of it: the speaker of this poem, well aware of the inevitability of separation, does not fear it in the least, no matter how acute sorrow it may cause to both her lover and herself. Instead, as if to say that their love will endure exactly as long as she continues to miss him, she firmly believes in what Lockwood terms "a love for life." (*W.H.*, VII)

This paradoxical reversal of qualities of love, the change of its inevitable sorrow into something existentially vital in the consciousness of the sufferer, also underlies a medley of love and separation experienced by Augusta Geraldine Almeda, the most spectacular figure in the saga. Love adventure being the most constant factor of her life, she is busy in falling in love. What is characteristic of her series of love is that they never fail to end tragically with the separation of the lovers--the death of her loved one or else her desertion of her lover.

Thus like the monologist in the above-quoted poem, she lives on the sorrow of love rather than on its joy. The most striking thing about her love is that just as the caterpillar in the essay "lives only by destroying the plant which protects him," she destroys some of those who love her: she drives Fernando de Samara to suicide, deserts and destroys Lord Alfred; the unnamed young boy, Angelica's lover-turned-Augusta's, is sent into exile by her. However,

she differs in one respect from the ugly caterpillar and all the created beings as Emily Bronte defines them in "The Butterfly": unlike the latter, Augusta does not destroy others because she "must be the relentless instrument of death to the others, or [her]self cease to live."

Let us focus our attention for a while on her love for Lord Alfred. If she destroyed him implacably or "for her amusement," what are we to do with the irremediable sense of guilt felt by her?:

I know that I have done thee wrong--
Have wronged both thee and Heaven--
And I may mourn my lifetime long
Yet may not be forgiven.

(H. 169)

Or so deep a sense of loss and woe as expressed in H. 61?:

O wander not so far away!
O love, forgive this selfish tear--
It may be sad for thee to stay,
But how can I live lonely here. . .
He looks on all with eyes that speak
So deep, so drear a woe to me!
There is a faint red on his cheek
Not like the bloom I used to see.

In both these poems her spiritual anguish is so intense that Augusta and not Lord Alfred seems to be the victim, the one who most suffers. Here again we can hardly help feeling that in the intensity of her anguish she is trying to find the confirmation of the strength of her love. Why then did she desert him for all the pangs coming from his desertion?

H. 100 may afford us a glimpse as to what on earth led her to desert and destroy Lord Alfred:

Sacred watcher, wave thy bells!
Fair hill flower and woodland child!
Dear to me in deep green dells--

Dearest on the mountains wild.
Bluebell, even as all divine
I have seen my darling shine--
Bluebell, even as wan and frail
I have seen my darling fail--
Thou hast found a voice for me,
And soothing words are breathed by thee.
Thus they murmur, "Summer's sun
Warms me till my life is done.
Would I rather choose to die
Under winter's ruthless sky?
"Glad I bloom and calm I fade;
Weeping twilight dews my bed;
Mourner, mourner, dry thy tears--
Sorrow comes with lengthened years!"[13]

Here, resting in the memory of her dead loved one symbolized as a bluebell, she is singularly in tune with the fact that he is no more, as if to say it was appropriate that he should die at that stage of his career as a lover. Do the last lines which, read strictly in the context of their love, can be taken to convey the same belief as expressed in H. 43 (Thank the power that made thee part ／ Ere that parting broke your heart), explain the motive of her cruelty? If so, then it would be that she deserted him because she dreaded a greater pain to be tasted by both Lord Alfred and herself at parting after the prolonged bliss of love, or possibly disillusionment after the consummation of love. But even if we concede that this is true, it still leaves half-accounted for the serenity or rather the blissful state of mind which she seems enjoying to the full. This brings us to the observation of 'memory' which is in fact nothing short of a keyword in the world of Emily Bronte's poetry.

Emily Bronte presents the human situation as such that no one is entire of himself; unity with another being is vital for his existence; and yet such unity is something unattainable but for a passing moment. Central characters in her poems are mainly placed in a state of the loss of this unity and the sense of bereavement is often expressed as a condition of exile, imprisonment, isolation, or in terms of the grief of the living for the dead. For them the loss is irretrievable; once separated, they can never be united on this side of the grave. The sad refrain of the poems is "Never again." Hence they prize memory and cling to it in a

desperate attempt to muffle the refrain:

All hushed and still within the house;
Without--all wind and driving rain;
But something whispers to my mind,
Through rain and through the wailing wind,
Never again.
Never again? Why not again?
Memory has power as real as thine.

(H. 45)

Thus Gondal is, in a way, a memory-ridden world. Its people are pursued by a memory of an earlier time of "transient brilliancy." (H. 94) For them memory is double-faced: on the one hand, it torments them with the recollection of a past moment of sovereign joy; at the same time, though, they are fully aware that it is all they have against the vicissitudes of human relations. So, in the final analysis, no matter how much tormented by a haunting memory, they are never willing to part with it on any account. With full trust in it as a counterforce to 'forgetting,' which is most feared in Gondal,[14] they turn to it for the realization that "they *do* live more in earnest, more in themselves, and less in surface, change, and frivolous external things," that they live a life that transcends time, place, and even mortality. This is why only when in moments of communion with memories are they really alive, really themselves. This is why when someone questions Augusta about her forsaking Lord Alfred, she can answer: "No--not forgot--eternally ／ Remains its memory dear." (H. 110) And this is why R. Alcona can still lament J. Brenzaida's death after "fifteen wild Decembers." (H. 182)

It may not be irrelevant to remember here Heathcliff's lament for Catherine over eighteen years. Just as lives of the Gondal characters are determined by the lost intimacy with their loved ones, so his life is determined by the lost fusion with one who is his soul. After all, both the Gondal epic and *Wuthering Heights* are the exploration and dramatization of the degree to which our life on earth can be ruled by the one who is no more and whose sole but strong weapon is memory that will dominate our whole being, easily obliterating the barrier between this side and the other side of the tomb.

Augusta is singularly happy with the fact that Lord Alfred is dead because "its memory dear" makes it possible for her to keep "brilliancy" alive. However, it is not that she can keep alive a "brilliancy" as her former days saw it. What intoxicates her now is a no less

great "brilliancy" which a backward glance and nothing else can possibly give her--a beauty only retrospection can produce. Indeed it is this that makes all the Gondal characters so alive. Their eyes are fixed backward in retrospective fascination on some past moment; no matter how painful it may be, they cannot keep from looking backward; and in doing so they are not after the past itself but seeking the beauty that psychological action can bring. Perhaps the best way to describe their most fundamental inclination is to say that they are given to "Memory's rapturous pain." (H. 182)

Emily Bronte, for whom life as it stood was anything but attractive, was aware how imagination is *sine qua non* for the appreciation of the beauty life can create and how our imagination is operative only when the absence of reality--the loss of unity in the case of Gondal lovers--is preconditioned. While it is unknowable whether she got acquainted with this magic of imagination for herself or through reading Shakespeare[15], in this awareness she strangely remids us of what was theorized close on a century after she had died:

> So often, in the course of my life, reality had disappointed me because at the instant when my senses perceived it my imagination, which was the only organ that I possessed for the enjoyment of beauty, could not apply itself to it, in virtue of that ineluctable law which ordains that we can only imagine what is absent.[16]

Love in Emily Bronte's world is fated to end tragically, incapable of being fulfilled here. The separation of Augusta and Lord Alfred as well as that of Catherine and Heathcliff is by no means an unfortunate accident; it is the dramatic expression of an inevitable necessity, a law of life in Gondal or in the world of *Wuthering Heights*. It is not impossible to say that by depicting a love which moves from transient union to eternal separation in a self-contained universe Emily Bronte presented her vision of human life. It is possible to conclude that in dramatizing the significance of imagination and imagined things she found on our behalf one way of overcoming the vanity of our animal existence.

Notes

1. Fannie E. Ratchford, *The Brontes' Web of Childhood* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1964), p. 65.
2. T. J. Wise and J. A. Symington (ed.), *The Brontes: Their Lives, Friendship, and Correspondence* (Penn., 1980), vol. II, pp. 49-51.
3. C. W. Hatfield (ed.), *The Complete Poems of Emily Jane Bronte* (Columbia U., 1941). This volume will be cited hereafter as "H." followed by the number put for each poem in this edition.

4. Emily Bronte, "The Butterfly," *Five Essays Written in French*, trans. Lorine White Nagel (Texas, 1948), p. 17.
5. *Ibid., p. 18.*
6. Charlotte Bronte, "Editor's Preface to the New Edition of *Wuthering Heights*" ed. David Daiches (The Penguin English Library, 1972), p. 38.
7. Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Bronte* (The Penguin English Library, 1977), p. 95.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 131.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 147.
11. Charlotte Bronte, *op. cit.*, p. 38.
12. J. Hills Miller, *The Disappearance of God* (Harvard U., 1975), p. 171.
13. In taking this particular lyric as a reference to Lord Alfred I followed the interpretation of Mary Visick. See *The Genesis of Wuthering Heights*, intro. Edmund Blunden (Conn., 1980), p. 26.
14. See, for instance, H. 22, 47, 110, 182.
15. Cf. *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, v. i, in which appears the following sentence, in addition to the more famous passage defining imagination:

    The best in this kind are but shadows; and the worst are no worse, if imagination amend them.
16. Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. Andreas Mayor (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972) . vol. XII, p. 230.